The Social Participation of Local Politicians

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Introduction

This paper concentrates on the link between the social capital of local representatives in Hungary and the democratic performance of representatives and of their institution, the local government. The main questions which this paper addresses are as follows: Do local representatives have more democratic values? Do local representatives with more social capital act more democratically? Do local governments in which councilors have more social capital have better democratic performance? This can be summarized in one question: Does the social capital of local representatives contribute to the institutional performance of local governments?

One way to answer these questions is the use of social capital research. Putnam's Making Democracy Work (1993) initiated a new research agenda on the political consequences of social capital. Although there is no single concept of social capital, it clearly refers to a social phenomenon, which is outside the realm of politics but has an impact on political life. The main message of Putnam (1993) was that horizontally organized, civic society furthers social capital, which facilitates co-operation and yields good governance. Several critiques (e.g. Levi 1996, Brehm and Rahn 1997, Foley and Edwards 1996, Jackman and Miller 1996) pointed to the under-specified nature of the exact mechanisms through which social organization and institutional performance are linked. In fact, Putnam (1993:182) mentions briefly two possible reasons underlying this relationship. (1) Citizens in civic regions can make effective demands to governments through their collective acts: “citizens in civic communities expect better government and (in part through their own efforts) they get it”. (2) Both citizens and their political leaders in civic regions have the social capability to co-operate and treat others as equals: “the performance of representative government is facilitated by the social infrastructure of civic communities and the democratic values of both officials and citizens”. This point comes up in other places in the book, arguing in favor of, for, the responsible character of leaders in civic communities (Putnam 1993:88). Conspicuously enough, the problem of the social capital of decision-makers is largely under-researched.

Politicians join social groups and networks for two reasons. Like 'ordinary people', they may have a desire for social life in which they can achieve a personal satisfaction. On the other hand, politicians also use their social connections instrumentally by using them as means of extending political support. Both motivations can lead to two side effects that are beneficial for democratic practice. First, interactions with equals in horizontally organized social groups can develop a political culture that favors democratic solutions. Social capital theory argues that participants in the life of social networks unintentionally take up virtues such as tolerance, social trust, respect for social and political equality and the like. Politicians with more democratic values are more likely to make more effort at consultation with citizens. Second, interactions in social groups may also strengthen interpersonal accountability. Even nonpolitical groups can provide an opportunity for citizens to request account for the actions of politicians. This accountability implies answerability rather than institutionalized enforcement (for the distinction of the two types of accountability, see Schedler 1999). Still, the importance of reward and punishment caused by interpersonal accountability must not be understated, especially in small-scale local societies. The negative consequences of a bad account can be both social (the loss of reputation in local society) and political (the loss of political support). It can be argued that the realization of these two potentially democratic effects of group linkages depends on the motivation of the (local) politician. Purely social motivation, especially with long socialization, favors the development of a democratic political culture. However, the often non-political character of these groups and the non-political motivation of joining them makes interpersonal accountability less likely. Political motivation, on the other hand, increases the likelihood of political accountability, since group membership serves as a means to extend political support. Consequently, politically

motivated members of social groups behave in a different way than those who simply want to spend their time agreeably: they politicize their social networks, make political arguments, promise policies and so forth. Such a reliance on group linkages make them more vulnerable to requests of accounts.

This paper seeks to shed more light on the mechanisms through which group linkages of local politicians have an effect on the political performance of local governments. It is divided into five sections. The first section explores the amount of social capital among local politicians and sets out to demonstrate the factors that influence membership in a social organization. In this research the concept of social capital refers to 'social connectedness', (imperfectly) indicated by membership in a civil society organization (CSO). Since many authors identify social capital with interpersonal trust, analysis will also control for social trust where possible. Social capital is claimed to make both citizens and leaders more democratic. The second section, therefore, examines the relationship between social capital and interpersonal trust, trust within council, attitudes toward social equality, political equality, political participation and the existing political system. The two subsequent sections concentrate on the democratic impact of the social capital of local decision-makers. Through democratic practice or democratic performance, this research identifies the realization of norms such as openness, transparency, fairness and responsiveness. When assessed, measures will concentrate on the effort of decision-makers at a two-way communication between citizens and decision-makers, as indicators of the norms listed above. The focus of the third section is on the effect of individual social capital on the political performance of individual local politicians. The fourth section analyzes the relationship between the democratic performance of local government and the aggregated social capital of local representatives. Finally, a short concluding section draws up the balance sheet of the evidence presented in the paper and outlines some opportunities for further research.

The data used in the paper were generated in two surveys organized by the Tocqueville Research Center and funded by the Local Government Initiative (Open Society Institute). The first survey was conducted with the chief executive officers of 650 Hungarian local governments between February and March 2001. This dataset was weighted in such a way that the distribution corresponded with the distribution of all local governments in Hungary. The second survey was a mail survey with 1786 local government representatives in Hungary between March and June 2001. These data were not weighted. New data from other countries will be available during the course of 2002. This will provide an opportunity to retest the claims of this paper and widen its argument.

I. The Profile of the Socially Active Councilor

This is an explorative chapter which attempts to describe the level and determinants of the social participation of local government representatives in Hungary. Social participation is operationalized as a function of membership in civil society organizations (CSOs). The question was formulated in the Local Representative Survey in the following way: "Are you personally a member of any association, foundation, or other civil society organization?" Over half (56.1 percent) of local councilors are current members of a social organization.

A second question asked in how many organizations the respondent was a member. Most of the respondents are members of only one (46%) or two (31%) organizations. Members of more than five organizations are rare. This is undoubtedly a matter of time management, with councilors having to choose between competing commitments.

In most cases (80%), local representatives hold an office, meaning they have a role as an officer, in the social organization to which they belong. This can be explained both by the stronger of local politicians in local societies and the small size of most civil society organizations. Local politicians are invariable held in high-esteem, and spend their time attempting to earn the respect of the local community. The fact that most social organizations are small means that a charismatic, well-respected person will play a leading role in the organization.

Table 1: Number of memberships and offices in civil society organizations

	Proportion of members in the sample	Number of CSO memberships among CSO members	Number of memberships in CSOs independent of local government funding	Proportion of office-holders among CSO members
0	43,9%		20,5%	20,3%
1	26,1%	45,8%	40,4%	53,3%
2	17,5%	30,8%	22,7%	18,3%
3	8,6%	15,2%	10,4%	5,8%
4	2,5%	4,4%	3,5%	,7%
5	9,3%	1,6%	1,5%	1,2%
6	0,6%	1,0%	0,7%	,3%
7	0,2%	0,8%	0,2%	
8	0,3%	0,3%		
9	0,1%	0,5%		
10	0,1%	0,2%		
Total	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%
N	1078	605	547	585

Source: LRS 2001

Local politicians often participate in social organizations because of their position in local government. Hence, it is worth asking the question, which appeared in the survey, as to how many of the social organizations of which local representatives are members rely on local government subsidies as their main source of (financial) support? This allows us to see membership in so-called 'independent' CSOs. One fifth of respondents who are members of social organizations are, in fact, members of CSOs that depend financially on local government. Of those who are members of more than one social organization, a high percentage (80%) include in their membership portfolio at least one independent CSO.

Typically, socially active councilors spend between one and ten hours per week on activities of their CSOs. Every ninth respondent proved to be very active in a social organization, putting in more than 20 hours work per week.

Table 2: Time spent on CSO activities

	Time spent on CSO activities
No time spent	17,8%
1-10 hours per week	57,6%
11-20 hours per week	13,6%
More than 20 hours per week	11,0%
Total	100,0%
N	589

Source: LRS 2001

What profit do representatives gain from being involved in the life of civil society organizations? A question in the representative survey listed four possible political advantages a politician can obtain from social participation: (i) Information. Access to first-hand information was the most frequently selected category (59%). (ii) Networking. A politician always has an interest in monitoring public opinion and getting feedback on political decisions. Respondents found networking almost as important (54%) as information. Building up connections is a crucial precondition of political success. The other two options, focusing on political education benefits, were less frequently chosen. (iii) `Management skills`. Participation in a civil society organization is a good school for learning how to conciliate various and often diverging interests, and for how to reach a decision through the consent of major stakeholders. 37 percent of respondents claimed they had learned conflict-management skills in civil organizations. (iv) `Organizational skills.` Strangely enough, the category that proved to be the least popular (23%) referred to a basic competence, organizational skills. Such skills can easily be learnt in civil society organizations and are very useful in practical politics.

Table 3: Uses of civil society membership for local representatives

In which of the following ways does your participation in civil organizations help your work as a representative?	Percent of respondents selecting the answer
Networking	53.7%
More information on what residents think	59.4%
Organizational, managerial experience	23.4%
Better able to handle conflicts	37.2%

Source: LRS 2001

Multivariate analysis of CSO membership

What determines the membership of local representatives in civil society organizations? To answer this question, Table 4 shows four statistical models in which a number of potentially useful variables are included. All models include the population of municipality as a basic control variable. Model 1 includes demographic features of respondents (age, gender, and education). Model 2 adds political variables (party membership, mayoral status, and political experience) and parents' membership (indicating early socialization and elite reproduction) to the previous factors. Model 3 includes optimism regarding the future following Uslaner's (1999) theory. Finally, Model 4 provides the opportunity to control for the cultural dimension of social capital, that is, interpersonal generalized trust.

Model 1 contains three major demographic variables: age, gender and education. The older a representative, the more likely his or her membership in a civil society organization. Of the respondents, men are 1.7 times more likely to participate in civil society organizations than women. Finally, educated representatives (who finished at least secondary school) are 1.8 times more likely to be members of a CSO.

Model 2, however, shows that demography is less important than it appears at first sight. The age of representatives turned out to be unimportant when political factors (especially previous political experience) were included into the analysis. The gender gap also seems to be explained by political variables. Membership in a political party is the best predictor of membership in a social organization: party members are almost four times more likely to also join a civil society organization. Previous political experience, gained in the previous regime or in the present system, also makes CSO membership more likely. Cultural pattern of participatory culture can be inherited: those whose parents had an office in social or political organization are 1.7 times more likely to join a CSO.

Uslaner (1999) seems to be right since optimistic respondents are more likely to have CSO

membership. The variable of optimism somewhat increases the explanatory power of the model, without seriously affecting the weights of other variables in Model 3. However, mainstream social capital researchers are also correct, since interpersonal trust has a clear effect on membership, which does not make optimism (or other variables) insignificant in Model 4.

Many CSOs in Hungary are dependent on local government, mostly in financial matters. In Model 5, the dependent variable is membership of social organizations that are independent of local government funding. There is one major change in Model 5, compared to Model 4, that the mayoral status lost its significance. Since mayors often become board members in the CSOs of local government, this result is quite well interpretable.

Table 4: Determinants of social capital (odds ratios of logistic regression analysis)

Dependent variable: CSO membership	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Education (finished secondary school)	1.8***	1.6***	1.5***	1.4***	1.7***
Age	1.01***	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
Gender (woman)	0.6***	0.8	0.9	0.9	0.9
Political party membership		3.8***	3.5***	3.4***	3.1***
Mayor		1.8**	1.6**	1.8**	1.4
Political experience before 1990		1.3***	1.3***	1.3***	1.2*
Political experience in local government		1.3***	1.3***	1.3***	1.3***
Participation of parents		1.7***	1.6***	1.6***	1.6***
Optimism			1.3***	1.3***	1.2***
Social trust				1.3***	1.2**
Population of municipality	1.0***	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
Negelkerke's R^2	.14	.25	.28	.29	.28
Percent correct prediction statistic	65%	70%	70%	71%	70%

*Significance of Wald-statistic: * p<0.10 ** p < 0.05 *** p<0.01; N=931*

Conclusion

We can conclude that an analysis of the type of local representative involved in social participation, through membership in social organizations, provides some concrete and interesting findings. Over half of Hungarian local representatives join (mostly one or two) civil society organizations, in which they typically have an office and, in most cases, one of them is independent of local government subsidies. Membership is more than symbolic for most local representatives, since they invest a certain amount of time in social activities.

Representatives believe that CSO membership is politically profitable in terms of networking opportunities and improved information-flow. Developmental effects (organizational experience and conflict-management) are less important for local politicians than political uses. Although this contradicts the claims of social capital research, such a self-report cannot be treated as evidence supporting or rejecting the hypotheses of social capital theory.

Multivariate analysis shows that a crucial personal resource, human capital (measured by education and, partly, parents' membership), makes people more sociable and, probably, more interested in social cooperation. The importance of party membership and political experience indicates that the

motivation of local representatives to join social organization is not limited to the fulfillment of needs for social life and interest-articulation. The findings on the uses of CSO membership and the significance of political variables point to a mixture of social and political reasons for joining civil society organizations.

Evidence supports the claims on the importance of cultural characteristics in social participation. There is, however, a causality riddle here, which is beyond the scope of this paper.

II. Civic Virtues and Social Capital of Local Representatives

A central claim of the social capital literature is that there is a significant association between horizontal networks embedded in civil society and 'civic virtues', that is, interpersonal trust, solidarity, tolerance of the views of others, willingness to deliberate, active participation in public affairs, respect for social and political equality, and the like. (For a forceful exposition of the argument, see Putnam 1993: 86-91.) Face-to-face social relationships, as the theory goes, have a developmental effect on individuals, making them more civic. Civic values, norms and attitudes are claimed to form the basis of democratic society and, consequently, contribute to good governance. This section tests the developmental hypothesis in the case of local representatives. Membership in civil society organizations will be related to social trust, intra-elite trust, democratic legitimacy and respect for social equality, political equality, and political participation of citizens with a control for other potential explanatory factors.

Interpersonal trust

According to the social capital argument, participation in social organizations promotes cooperation among equals, which leads to mutual respect and trust. This claim is not new, of course, and was empirically supported in the Civic Culture (Almond and Verba 1963) as early as the 1960s. Putnam (1993) repeated this argument and provided additional evidence. Uslaner (1999) offers an alternative approach, arguing that trust depends on optimism for the future, and not civic organizations. "Optimism leads to generalized trust, which promotes civic activism, which creates a prosperous community, leading to increasing optimism. Pessimistic people trust only their own kind." In his view, optimistic people are more willing to join social organizations and be trusting. Thus, the relationship between generalized interpersonal trust and membership is spurious.

Interpersonal generalized trust was measured on the basis of agreement with the following statement (Q45ai): "Most people are simply vile and are looking to exploit the others." (The seven-point scale has been reversed and normalized to express trust and to be appropriate for regression analysis.) As Model 1 to 3 in Table 5 shows, membership in a social organization has a significant effect, even if five other variables are added in Model 3. Optimism does not decrease the weight of membership; rather it has an independent effect (Model 2). Age and education also contribute to social trust (Model 3).

Time is needed for the inculcation of civic values. Respondents with CSO membership were divided into two groups: those who had an office before their election and those who have lately received such a function. If the theory is correct, 'old participants' have more trust in others than 'new participants'. Model 5 clearly rejects this claim; actually, new office-holders expressed more trust than old ones. This supports the hypothesis of an exogenous factor that encourages both trust and membership. The low weight of optimism does not argue for its importance.

The last row of the table indicates that these explanatory variables cannot explain much of the level of trust.

Table 5: Social capital and interpersonal trust (regression analysis)

Dependent variable: Interpersonal trust	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
CSO membership	.18***	.17***	.13***	
Old office-holder in CSO				.08**
New office-holder in CSO				.12***
Optimism		.09**	.09**	.09***
Level of education			.11***	.13***
Age			.07**	.09**
Gender			.02	.02
Population of municipality	.08**	.07**	.04	.04
Adjusted R^2	.04	.05	.07	.07

*Significance of t-statistic: * p<0.10 ** p< 0.05 *** p<0.01; N=950*

Intra-elite trust

Social capital theory argues that social activity in horizontally organized groups creates trust, which in turn facilitates cooperation among decision-makers. Social capital is consequently expected to increase mutual trust in the representative bodies.

Two questions measured trust in fellow politicians. The first gauged in-group trust ("How much trust do you place in the promises made by those who belong to your group of representatives or by those with whom you usually vote in accord?") and the second assessed out-group trust ("How much trust do you place in the promises made by those who belong to a different group of representatives or by those with whom you usually have a serious difference of opinion?"). Two sets of linear regression analyses tested the effect of a number of potential explanatory variables on bonding and bridging intra-elite trust. In addition to demographics (gender, age, education), political characteristics (mayor, party member, political experience, and left and right), a special set of variables (Q24) are used to assess the social relationships of council members. Four questions were raised on the number of fellow councilors (a) who are friends or relatives, (b) with whom the respondent has a professional relationship, (c) with whom the respondent cooperates in social organization, and (d) who the respondent knew before his or her election to the municipality council.

One can draw some major conclusions from the findings presented in Table 6. Generalized, interpersonal trust is consistently a good predictor of intra-elite trust. All else being equal, representatives who trust in others are more likely to trust their fellow politicians' promises than those who have less generalized social trust. Optimism, on the other hand, predicts in-group trust better than out-group trust, which is contradictory to theory. Membership in social organization has no significant weight when other cultural variables are included. This does not reject the social capital hypothesis, since it claims the direct effect of cultural phenomena and social connections.

Surprisingly, cooperation with fellow representatives in social organization has no effect on intra-council trust. Less surprisingly, friendship and longer acquaintance have a significant positive effect on cooperative attitudes. (It must be emphasized that social trust has an effect even if these social connections are controlled for.) Party membership does not increase trust in members of the same faction, but has a highly significant and negative effect on trust in members of other factions. The interpretation of the weights of party sympathies and political experience certainly requires more analysis.

Finally, the relationship between social capital and trust within the political elite was tested by means of agreement with the following statement (Q45ag): "It is dangerous to make deals with one's political enemies as it will lead to conflicts in one's own political camp." (The scale has been reversed to indicate readiness of cooperation.) This allows the expression of general attitudes by disregarding the concrete persons in the milieu of the respondent. Model 9 shows that the only significant variable is interpersonal trust and neither optimism nor membership has importance. This result is the same as one can find in the previous models.

Table 6 Social capital and intra-council trust (regression analysis)

Dependent variable:	Trust in representatives in own faction				Trust in representatives outside own faction				Attitude to cooperation
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8	Model 9
CSO membership	.11***		.05	.04	.05		-.00	.02	-.00
Optimism		.11***	.10***	.07*		.04	.04	.06*	-.05
Social trust		.22***	.22***	.20***		.22***	.23***	.23***	.20***
Friendship with fellow politicians				.13***				.09**	-.03
Professional contacts with fellow politicians				.00				.03	.02
Cooperation in CSO with fellow politicians				.06				-.00	.02
Long acquaintance with fellow politicians				.09***				.06*	-.02
Political party membership				.06				-.18***	.05
Mayor				-.02				.00	.01
Political experience before 1990				-.13***				-.03	.00
Political experience in local government				.07*				.01	.02
Support for leftist parties				.13****				.11***	-.02
Support for rightist parties				.05				-.07*	.03
Participation of parents				.06				.01	-.02
Level of education				-.00				-.01	.01
Age				-.04				-.03	.03
Gender				-.04				.04	.06
Population of municipality	.02	.00	.00	.05	-.17***	-.19***	-.19***	-.06	-.10**
Adjusted R^2	.01	.07	.07	.13	.03	.08	.07	.14	.04

*Significance of t-statistic: * p<0.10 ** p< 0.05 *** p<0.01; N=786*

However, even the final models do not explain much of the variance in intra-elite trust (13%, 14% and 4%, respectively). Many idiosyncratic reasons might influence the actual level of mutual trust in municipality councils.

Civic values

According to social capital theory, both citizens and leaders have a distinctive set of civic values in horizontally organized communities. Associations are claimed to instill values such as social and political equality, support for citizen participation and democratic legitimacy. The regression models in Table 7 show the effect of the potentially explanatory variables on these values.

Support for social equality is measured by the degree of agreement with two statements (Q45u: "Discrepancies in salaries should be continually reduced." and Q45r: "In every situation poor people should be given more opportunities than rich people.") While membership in social organization has a significant relationship in Model 1, it disappears when cultural variables and education are also included (Model 2). What really deserves attention is the negative direction of weights. All else being equal, representatives with high social trust are less supportive of equality in society. High social capital works against equality. Generally speaking, optimistic, trust and educated people do not want to share their relative wealth with others, probably because they belong to the group of winners.

Political equality was measured by an index composed of five statements (Q45c: "Every citizen should have an equal chance to influence government policy."; Q45m: "Few people really know what is in their best interests in the long run."; Q45p: "It will always be necessary to have a few strong, able people actually running everything."; Q45w: "In this complicated world the only way we can know what is going on is to rely on leaders or experts who can be trusted."; Q45ae: "Certain people are better qualified to run this country due to their traditions and family background."). The weight of CSO membership in Model 1 becomes much weaker in Model 2 in which the powerful variable of social trust is included. Members of political parties are committed to the value of political equality, while the supporters of rightist parties favor political equality significantly less.

Attitudes toward political participation are assessed by means of an index that contained five statements (Q45a: "The complexity of modern day issues requires that only the more simple questions should be considered publicly."; Q45f: "Widespread participation in decision-making often leads to undesirable conflicts."; Q45i: "Most decisions should be left to the judgement of experts."; Q45j: "Only those who are fully informed on the issues should vote."; Q45o: "Participation of the people is not necessary if decision-making is left in the hands of a few trusted competent leaders."). In a similar way to the previous regression analyses, the effect of CSO membership (Model 5) disappears when social trust steps in (Model 6). Party members recognize the importance of citizen participation better than others. One can notice some other significant relationships that call for more analysis.

Support for the existing political system is measured by agreement with two statements, one about democracy in general (Q45al: "Democracy is not perfect, but it is still the best possible form of government for Hungary.") and the other about the local government system in particular (Q45aa: "The new local governments do a better job than the councils of pre-1990."). Those who have social capital, trust and optimism feel a deeper legitimacy of the political system than those whose social capital, trust and optimism are more limited. Ex-communists and leftist respondents have significantly less support for the present political system. This might be explained by the fact that former communists and liberals were in opposition in the national parliament at the time of the data collection.

Table 7: Social capital and civic values (regression analysis)

	Social equality		Political equality		Political participation		System legitimacy	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8
CSO membership	-.11***	-.01	.13***	.07*	.06*	-.02	.19***	.08**
Optimism		-.13***		-.04		-.02		.18***
Social trust		-.12***		.19***		.23***		.18***
Political party membership		.05		.14***		.11***		-.03
Mayor		-.00		.00		.02		-.01
Political experience before 1990		.03		-.02		.11**		-.11***
Political experience in local government		-.07**		.02		-.01		.07**
Support for leftist parties		-.01		.03		-.07**		-.08**
Support for rightist parties		-.07**		-.10****		-.08**		.19***
Participation of parents		.00		.02		-.02		.01
Level of education		-.23***		.04		.02		.04
Age		.06		-.01		-.03		.02
Gender		-.00		-.02		-.07**		-.05
Population of municipality	-.05	-.02	.08**	.01	-.12***	-.06	-.04**	.04
Adjusted R^2	.01	.12	.02	.07	.02	.08	.04	.20

Significance of t-statistic: * p<0.10 ** p< 0.05 *** p<0.01; N=786

Conclusion

The findings presented here are rather mixed. Social participation, indicated by membership in a civil society organization, is clearly linked to the amount of trust respondents have in others. Nonetheless, the time spent in social organizations does not have an effect on the level of generalized social trust. Social trust apparently has a strong influence on the trust representatives have in fellow councilors, and the social and political values tested here. Since CSO membership has no significant effect, further research should clarify to what extent a 'membership - social trust - intra-elite trust' logic has validity. In conclusion, membership in a civil society organization does not have much effect on civic virtues, except for social trust and system legitimacy. Interpersonal generalized trust, however, always has significance.

III. Political Performance and Social Capital of Local Representatives

Hypotheses

Representatives are elected to speak and act on behalf of their voters. This requirement is not absolute, since elected politicians have the right and duty to decide on a rational basis, taking broader and longer-term interests into account. While responsiveness is not absolute, democracy requires a lively contact between the elected and electors. Therefore, a representative who does not make efforts to recognize citizens' wants and needs is not a democratic leader.

This chapter focuses on the effect of membership in social organizations on local politicians'

activities to consult with their voters. The previous argument of this paper allows three hypotheses on the possible link between social capital, measured as CSO membership, and representation. While the first two focus on two potential mechanisms (political culture and social control) presented by social capital research, the third argues that there is in fact no relationship between social capital and political performance.

1. The political culture argument. One of the (politically) exogenous hypotheses suggests the importance of political culture as an intervening variable. Socially active politicians are engaged in cooperation. The experience of pluralism leads to a deeper recognition of others and a willingness to listen to others' interests and deliberate with them. This, in turn, results in a more favorable attitude toward the inclusion of citizens in the democratic decision-making process. Such an attitude encourages representatives to spend more effort on keeping in contact with their voters.

2. The interpersonal accountability argument. The second hypothesis claims that group linkages of local politicians are important because face-to-face contacts imply the frequent opportunity for fellow members in the CSO to request account for the actions of their representatives. To avoid shaming, local politicians perform better in representing their voters. Social control is an intervening variable between social capital and democratic performance.

3. The political ambition argument. The third hypothesis assumes that politicians join social organizations to extend their political resources. Politicians who seek political support in local society are also more likely to lay more stress on active contacts with voters. Consequently, a positive association is hypothesized between social participation and representative activities, but this is regarded as a spurious relationship, since both are influenced by the desire for more public support.

All three hypotheses predict a positive, significant relationship between membership in social organizations and representation activities, but they assume different variables that connect the two factors. The three hypotheses are not mutually exclusive. The goal of this chapter is to test this general prediction and, as far as data allow, the validity of the three hypotheses.

Models of statistical analysis

Democratic performance as consultation efforts is operationalized by an index of activities. The LRS questionnaire contained questions on four activities concerning communication with citizens: forum to voters (Q31); office hours to voters (Q29); publishing articles on public issue (Q32); and giving interviews (Q33). An index can be constructed from the four items (Cornbach-alpha = .74). The index is the dependent variable in the following regression models. To increase robustness, the regression analysis was repeated for each component variable of the index (tables not shown here).

Six linear regression models were built to reach the analytical objectives of this chapter. Municipality size, operationalized as the number of inhabitants in 1999 according to the Hungarian Central Statistical Office, and three demographic variables (age, gender and the level of education) are basic variables and are included in all regression models. Model 1 includes membership in a social organization (dummy variable) and the basic control variables.

Model 2 includes political culture variables. It includes the attitude of respondents toward political participation to control variables. The index of political participation attitudes is composed of five political culture questions (Q45a, Q45f, Q45i, Q45j, Q45o). If the political culture hypothesis is correct, Model 2 will show a decreasing effect of CSO membership.

Model 3 adds a proxy measure of social control in CSOs to the analysis. If fellow members in CSOs request account for political positions and actions, their opinion should be important for politicians. The degree to which local politicians' opinion is influenced by CSOs refers to the strength of their accountability mechanisms. A question (Q40g) asked respondents to evaluate the extent to which

CSOs have an impact on their political standpoint. This measure is far from being perfect, but it can be used for a first attempt to test the accountability hypothesis.

Model 4 includes four variables referring to political motivation. Membership in a political party is a sign of political ambition. Becoming a mayor usually requires much work, and only highly-motivated politicians can survive the selection process. Participation in political education clearly refers to political ambitions and may teach the importance of the frequent contacts with citizens as a means of political survival. Finally, political competition, operationalized as the number of factions in the representative body of the local government, was added as a major obstacle for non-motivated would-be politicians. If the third hypothesis is correct, the addition of these variables should make the effect of CSO membership less significant.

Model 5 includes all the variables at once and adds some variables that emerged in the literature in the context of this paper. Interpersonal social trust as an alternative measure of social capital is added to control for the claims of some social capital theories. Life optimism is included because some other social capital theorists, e.g. Uslaner (1999), regard optimism as a common cause of both social participation and trust. Two variables expressing the sympathy for leftist and rightist political parties were also added. (A factor analysis of Q44 produced these two underlying dimensions of political party sympathies.) Participation of respondents' parents in social and political life was included because it can refer to both early socialization into a culture of participation and inherited cultural and social capital (a major basis of elite reproduction).

The final model, Model 6, goes back to the first hypothesis. It replaces the variable that is the subject of analysis, i.e. membership in social organizations, with two variables that separate those who had an office in social organization before their last election and those who are new as office-holders. If the political culture hypothesis is correct, 'old' office-holders, exposed to longer experience of pluralism, would make significantly more effort to keep in touch with citizens than 'new' office-holders.

Analysis

In each model in which it was included, social capital as membership in social organizations proved to be a consistently significant predictor. Even in Model 5, in which it was controlled for many variables, it preserved a significant weight.

Comparing Model 2 to Model 1, it is apparent that democratic values, allegedly developed by civil society organizations, do not contribute to democratic performance. Model 5 shows that none of the cultural variables are significant in the presence of other factors. Model 6 raises doubts about the socialization effects of groups membership. 'Old' and 'new' office-holders are equally likely to maintain the information flow between voters and representatives. Both groups perform significantly better than those who are not leaders in a social organization. The effect of membership does not depend on the length of time of membership. The political culture argument is not supported by the findings presented here.

The accountability hypothesis, in contrast, is not rejected by the evidence. Instead of an indirect, developmental effect, a direct formation of politician-members' opinion seems to take place in civil society organizations. Model 3 demonstrates that the inclusion of the influence of civil society organizations on political position lowers the weight of the membership of respondents. The tentative conclusion one can draw is that accountability mechanisms in CSOs lead to a better political performance of local representatives.

Findings in Model 4 support the ambition hypothesis. All four variables proved to be significant. Mayors, professional politicians whose everyday task is to keep in contact with citizens, and party members, who probably take politics more seriously, and those who prepared for political work in courses, all are more willing to communicate with citizens. Political competition also encourages democratic practice. To gain competitive advantage over other competing political forces, councilors

are forced to turn toward local citizens and get to know better their will. Unmotivated politicians could not survive in such an environment.

In all models, municipality size has a significant effect on representation activities. The increasing complexity of local society and the increasing gap between voters and representatives require more activities to maintain communication. Explaining the large effect of the level of education would require more analysis.

The analysis repeated for each component of the index resulted in more or less the same weights and significance levels. Both final models explain half of the variance in the dependent variable, which constitutes a high goodness of fit in social science.

Table 8: Social capital and democratic performance

Dependent variable: Democratic activities of local representatives	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
CSO membership	.26***	.26***	.20***	.18***	.15***	
Old office-holder in CSO						.10***
New office-holder in CSO						.09***
Support of political participation		,05			.02	.02
Social trust					.03	.03
Support for leftist parties					.01	.01
Support for rightist parties					-.03	-.03
Participation of parents					.02	.02
Optimism					-.05	-.05
Mayor				.37***	.37***	.36***
Membership in political party				.17***	.16***	.18***
Political education				.07**	.07**	.07**
Political competition in local government				.12**	.13***	.13***
CSO's influence on respondent's opinion			.17***		.12***	.14***
Level of education	.21***	.21***	.18***	.16***	.14***	.14***
Age	.10***	.09***	.10***	.07*	.07**	.07**
Gender (woman)	-.06**	-.06*	-.03	.00	.02	.02
Population of municipality	.32***	.32***	.31***	.21***	.20***	.19***
Adjusted R^2	.34	.34	.37	.51	.51	.51

*Significance of t-statistic: * p<0.10 ** p < 0.05 *** p<0.01; N=732*

Conclusion

The hypothesis based on the logic "membership - cooperation - participatory attitudes - democratic practices" did not gain much support in the analysis. Attitudes toward participation and CSO membership do not affect each other's effect on democratic practices, which contradicts the logic mentioned above. Political attitudes did not seem to be an intervening variable between civil organization membership and representation activities. (Actually, there is no significant variable of social or political culture in the final model.) It has also been seen that the length of time spent in civil society does not influence its effect. This also challenges the hypothesis, since more time should yield a deeper commitment to democratic practice.

Both the interpersonal accountability and political ambitions arguments gained more support in the

analysis. Characteristics that refer to political motivation clearly lower the importance of civil society membership in the models. This suggests that political ambition influences both CSO membership and political role, which is the claim of the second hypothesis. Accountability mechanisms in CSOs also proved to be an important factor in predicting the democratic performance of local representatives, which support the interpersonal accountability argument.

IV. Social Capital of Local Politicians and Local Government Performance

Measuring democratic performance

The book that started the wave of social capital research has strong claims on the link between social capital and government performance. Putnam (1993) argues that 'the most important factor in explaining good government is the degree to which social and political life in a region approximates the ideal of a civic community' (1993: 120). Norms of trust and reciprocity produced in small communities 'spill over' into the wider social and political realm and the improved cooperative capacities of such societies yield a more responsive and effective government. Other researchers (e.g. Stoner-Weiss 1997 in Russia, Milner and Ersson 2000 in Sweden, Cusack 1997 in Germany) replicated Putnam's research with more or less the same results.

The title of Putnam's book (Making Democratic Work) is misleading, as Laitin (1995) rightly claims, since his interest is in policy performance (decisional efficacy, the success of projects, street-level responsiveness) and not democratic practice. Even non-democratic governments can perform well according to Putnam's definition.

There is a tradition in political science rating the level of democracy of political institutions. Democratic performance usually means the level of democracy in the political system. Most scholars check a list of the formal features of a democracy, like free and competitive elections, multiparty system, universal suffrage, human rights, political violence and the time since these features characterize the political system (see e.g. Cutright 1963, Huntington 1968, Powell, 1982, Bollen & Jackman 1985, Diamond 1992, Hadenius 1992, Rueschemeyer et al. 1992, Nations in Transit 1997, Freedom House's annual report). In the case of sub-national governments, these measures would make little sense. Nonetheless, the values behind them are useful for the measurement of democratic performance in local governments. In this vein, Crook and Manor (1998) include the component of democracy in their multidimensional model by assessing the extent to which legal and political norms, such as fairness, probity, transparency, due process and political accommodation are embodied in the modes of operation of decentralized institutions in four countries of Asia and Africa. The everyday realization of democratic norms is conceptualized as a part of the performance of political institutions. It is important to note that this paper deals with performance measurement on the institutional level, not on the systemic one (as some of the listed democracy measures). Political science has a long and venerable tradition of evaluating the (usually democratic) performance of political systems, including several institutions from parliaments to political parties or the media. It is possible to compare the performance of local government systems. This paper, however, focuses on the institutional level and conceptualizes the performance measurement of local governments.

Democratic performance is perceived here as the capability of local government to be open and to include citizens in the decisions-making process. It is measured by six questions relating to democratic practices toward (1) citizens, (2) media and (3) civil organizations.

Table 9: Indicators of democratic performance of local government

	General	Budgeting
Citizenry	Number of forums and public hearings in 2000	Making draft budget public still before the municipal council adopted it

Local civil society	Number of civic organizations involved in local government decision-making	Discussing draft budget with civil society organizations
Local media	Frequency of initiation of contacts with journalists	Presentation of draft budget to civil society organizations

The Local Government Act in Hungary obliges municipalities to hold at least one public hearing each year. In addition to this compulsory hearing, municipalities can hold as many forums and public hearings as they wish. Two percent of municipalities did not even hold the single obligatory public hearing in 2000, and two-thirds held one. One in three local governments had more than one forum or public hearing, showing a higher performance. The number of such meetings with local citizenry indicates the openness of local government and the willingness of local leaders to involve citizens in the decision-making process. The second, more concrete indicator of the openness of local government towards local citizenry was a question to CAOs as to whether or not their municipalities made the draft budget public before the municipal council voted on it. One third of the surveyed municipalities open the way for the public discussion of the planning of their most important annual decision.

Two other indicators featured the efforts to include voluntary associations in the decision-making of local government. A question in the Local Government Survey asked information about the number of civic organizations involved in the preparation of local government decisions, e.g. as a consultant or through membership in a committee of the local assembly. In municipalities where there are civil organizations, 62 percent of Hungarian local governments did not involve any local civil society organizations and every tenth cooperated with the majority of local civil organizations. The other indicator concretized the collaboration in the budgetary field. The LGS shows that 29 percent of Hungarian municipalities find it important to ask the opinion of local civil society organizations on the distribution of collective resources.

Relations to media, as one of the crucial institutions in local political life, form the third set of measures. The frequency of initiation of contacts with journalists is a good indicator of the relationship between local government and local media. Where there is at least one media outlet, local governments attempt to keep contact with it: Only 7 percent of respondents said their local governments never had contact with journalists, while one third of municipalities approached journalists at regular intervals. The other indicator of media contacts is the question about the presentation of draft budget to journalists. One third of local governments presented the draft budget in 2000, while 63 percent did not (even if at least one media outlet existed in municipality).

Table 10: Democratic performance of Hungarian local governments

	High performance	Medium performance	Low performance
Forums and public hearings	More than 1 forum 47.0%	1 forum 51.7%	0 forum 1.8%
Making draft budget public	Yes 33.4%		No 65.8%
Civic organizations involved in local government decision-making	More than half of local civil organizations 9,6%	At least one organization, but less than half of them 28.2%	None (although there are civil organizations) 62.3%

Discussion of draft budget with civil society organizations	Yes 28.9%		No (although there are civil organizations) 71.1%
Frequency of initiation of contacts with journalists	At regular intervals 35.9	Occasionally 57.2%	Never (although there are local media) 6.9%
Presentation of draft budget to journalists	Yes 36.6%		No (although there are local media) 63.4%

Source: LGS 2001

Explanatory variables

A number of potentially useful variables were included in the analysis. Chief executive officers, respondents of the Local Government Survey, were asked to indicate the number of councilors who had an office in a civil society organization. The proportion of socially active representatives, computed from the information given by CAOs, served as the aggregate measure of the social capital of municipality councilors.

Three variables assessed the strength of civil society. CAOs indicated the number of civil society organizations in the municipality. This data is especially precise in smaller municipalities. Respondents also provided the number of media outlets with local coverage. Both variables refer to the level of organization of the local society. Social capital research argues that citizens in civic regions are more likely to assert their claims by organizing collective actions.

Collective actions form an intervening variable between the ecology of civil society and government performance. To test this claim, the Local Government survey collected information about five types of local collective political activities in the year 2000 (see Table 11). Judging from our data, the submission of proposals by civic organizations took place in the largest proportion of municipalities, and requests for meetings was the second most widespread tool used. Understandably, more conflicting actions such as demonstrations, petitions and challenging decisions at courts were not so generally employed. Although the frequency of court cases ranks third, it occurred in only 5% of the municipalities surveyed. In almost half (49%) of the Hungarian municipalities (usually small settlements), none of these actions took place in 2000.

Table 11: Citizen participation in local politics

	% of surveyed municipalities it was used	mean frequency	mean frequency where happened
Public demonstrations	3,0%	0,05	1,7
Petitions	13,0%	0,16	1,2
Requesting meetings	24,0%	1,17	13,2
Challenging local government decisions	5,0%	1,00	2,1
Civil society proposals	37,0%	1,63	4,4

Source: LGS 2001

Three variables controlled for the socio-economic milieu in which local governments function. The simplest, but usually most powerful variable is municipality size, measured by the number of inhabitants living on the territory of the local government. The association between socio-economic development and democracy is empirically extremely well-established (although the explanations for this relationship are from being systematic and convincing), so socio-economic development also has a place in a multivariable model. It is measured by an index of four measures (number of cars, private telephone lines, active enterprises and unemployed people per 1000 inhabitants). Table 12 shows the results of principal component analysis about the composition of the development index.

Table 12: Development index

Variable	Eigen-value	Percent of variance	Factor loadings
Number of cars per 1000 inhabitants	2.51	62.7	.89
Number of private telephones per 1000 inhabitants	.68	17.0	-.70
Number of active enterprises per 1000 inhabitants	.52	13.0	.74
Number of unemployed per 1000 inhabitants	.29	7.3	.83

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin = .75; Bartlett significance = .00000

Finally, a set of questions indicates the level of social tensions in municipality. The measure of social tension is the mean of these six variables.

Table 13: Level of tension in municipality

To what extent do the following differences cause social tensions between people in your community? (Scale 1-7)	Mean
Differences in income	4.0
Differences in religious beliefs or affiliation	1.5
Differences in political views	2.1
Differences in ethnic origins	2.4
Differences between parts of the municipality	1.8
Differences between those who always lived here and those who moved here only recently	2.5

Multivariate analysis

Table 14 shows the results of linear regression analysis in four models. It is striking that the embeddedness of local representatives in the local society has a significant and large effect in all models. This effect decreases when other features of civil society are also included, but remains the strongest predictor.

The civil society argument is supported by the data, as both the number of CSOs and media outlets have a significant and quite large effect. What is interesting is that media have a bigger weight than associations. The political, 'watchdog' function seems more important than a civil society that creates social trust and other cultural phenomena. The activity of local society is also a good predictor of local government performance.

Modernization theory is also supported, since socio-economic development has a separate effect even if civil society variables are controlled for. The model explains 43 percent of the variance in the democratic performance of local government, which is a very good result.

Table 14: Social capital and local government performance (regression analysis)

Dependent variable: Democratic performance of local government	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Proportion of representatives with CSO membership	.40***	.29***	.25***	.23***
Number of CSOs in municipality		.21***	.16***	.15***
Number of media outlets in municipality		.31***	.25***	.22***
Actions of civil society			.21***	.20***
Social tensions in municipality				.00
Socio-economic development				.12***
Population of municipality	.34***	.01	.00	.00
Adjusted R^2	.28	.39	.42	.43

*Significance of t-statistic: * p<0.10 ** p< 0.05 *** p<0.01; N=639*

Conclusion

On the societal level, social capital theory works extremely well. Citizens in more civic municipalities, to use Putnam's language, are able to make effective demands to governments through their cooperation. The density of civil society has a strong effect on the readiness of local governments to inform their citizens and to ascertain their opinion.

The measure of the social capital of councilors adds much to the understanding of the reasons for why certain local governments are more democratic than others. This effect, however, exists when civil society measures are controlled for. Leaders participating in social organizations produce more democracy, independently of the 'civicness' of the local community. Further research should clarify whether this independent effect is produced by the imperfect measurement of social capital or, as the previous argument suggests, the social capital of municipality councilors has other, more powerful determinants than 'civicness'.

Conclusion

The central question which this paper addresses is to what extent the social capital of local representatives contributes to democratic performance in Hungarian local governments. Social capital is operationalized as a function of membership in a civil society organization, although social trust is also considered in the analysis. Democratic performance is operationalized as the effort to consult with citizens. Results show that, even if several other potential factors are also included in the analysis, the social capital of local representatives has a significant effect on their individual democratic performance, and their aggregate social capital has a similar effect on the performance of local government.

A cultural explanation of these relationships did not contribute to a better understanding. The social capital of local politicians had no, or minimal effect on democratic values, and more democratic leaders do not make an increased effort to consult with their citizens. Civic culture cannot serve as an intervening factor. Political ambitions and interpersonal accountability in social groups would seem, potentially, to better explain the findings. Career-motivated politicians join social organizations and do more for fulfilling their duties as representatives. Therefore, the correlation between democratic performance and social capital is spurious. Interpersonal accountability is a potential by-product of group linkages. Face-to-face interactions imply an element of political accountability, especially in civil society organizations with a mission of influencing political life.

To test these hypotheses, future data collection and analysis should focus on separating politics-oriented social organizations from others, such as cultural, sport or educational organizations. Moreover, it should generate more knowledge about the level of accountability and should also

identify the motivations for joining a social organization. This would further assist in refining the analysis of the meaning of the membership of local councilors in civil society organizations.

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